

Faith schools accused of blocking NHS sexual health experts from the classroom

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Roman Catholic and Muslim faith schools in Blackburn have been accused of stopping the NHS Community Education Sexual Health team (CESH) from speaking with students about sex, relationships and contraception.

One member of the team said: "It's been extremely frustrating over ten or 12 years of working in this post. At one school a parent didn't like what we were doing and went to the governors. I then had a phone call from the school saying, I'm sorry, we have to take it out because you're talking about contraception."

The schools in question were not named by the CESH team, but several schools in the area told the *Lancashire Telegraph* that they handled all of their sex and relationship education (SRE) internally.

One Catholic school, which is planning to run sessions with the CESH team in the future, said that they currently provide "information around aspects of contraception in line with the Church's teaching."

Other schools encourage students to "formulate personal opinions" or to reach a "personal conclusion", whilst one, Our Lady and St John, instructs teachers to broach sex education "within the framework of the Catholic teaching on married life and contraception."

Whilst the schools in question are not accused of failing to deliver the minimum of sex and relationship education required by the national curriculum, CESH was set up in East Lancashire specifically because of the area's "historically high rates of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease", according to the *Lancashire Telegraph*.

Though several schools in the area told the *Lancashire Telegraph* that they provided their own SRE teaching internally, the CESH team warned that it may not be good enough in the future for schools to provide their own SRE education. CESH manager Sue Capstick said: "We would recommend that every school recognises the need for big cultural shift in the way we talk with, and listen to, young people about sex and relationships."

"Where in the past it may have been sufficient for staff in school to be the ones who do the condom demonstration or teach about body changes, we would highly recommend that schools ensure staff are up to date with the current themes around contraception and sexual health and have the confidence and skills needed to hold meaningful dialogue."

NSS campaigns manager Stephen Evans said: "The best interests of children must be the primary concern, and no school should be allowed to let religious dogma stand in the way of pupils receiving the unbiased information they need to prepare them for life in the outside world."

"As the experience in Blackburn demonstrates, the undue influence of religious groups involved in the running of faith schools is one of the main barriers to the provision of the kind of sex education

that is needed to encourage a healthier, more knowledgeable and sexually autonomous younger generation."

A spokesman for one Catholic school referred the *Lancashire Telegraph* to the Diocese of Salford. The Diocese of Salford's published teaching guidance states: "The secular view about sex outside of marriage, contraception, sexually transmitted disease, including HIV and AIDs, and abortion should not be presented as neutral information."

The guidance also says that "only those authorities or agencies that are qualified to speak on behalf of the Catholic Church should be permitted to speak to pupils or individuals on sexual or any other matter involving faith and morals. Any outside authority or agency should be authorised by the head teacher before giving any input in this field."

The National Secular Society has [previously called for](#) statutory sex and relationship education in all schools, including faith schools.

Additionally, the NSS is a core member of the [Sex Education Forum](#).

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